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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the consideration of societal and developmental contexts in interpersonal communication research, this essay addresses two common problems: (1) that studies of dyadic communicative interaction do not refer to the larger issues of social change and stability, as if the macro- and micro-levels of analysis can be treated in isolation; and (2) that interpersonal communication studies do not refer to the history of the relationships concerned, thus divorcing them from their developmental context. Two general axioms of relational development suggesting a different view of interpersonal communication are advanced: that society as we know it would not exist were it not for relational change, and that an interstage transition occurs between relational states. An interdependence is said to exist between stability of the social structure and relational development at the dyadic level. The paper also argues that relational change is the central concept necessary for connecting the micro- and macro-levels of social process. Two qualitative case studies of relational development are then presented to support these theoretical positions and to demonstrate the links between interpersonal and social processes. These studies rely on the structural theory of Paul Ricoeur and Claude Levi-Strauss and on the social theory of Anthony Giddens for analysis and interpretation. Notes and figures are appended. (JD)

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CHANGE AND STABILITY IN RELATIONSHIPS
AND SOCIETY

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CHANGE AND STABILITY IN RELATIONSHIPS
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ABSTRACT

Studies of interpersonal communication often neglect to place relationships in their societal context (synchronic dimension) and their developmental context (diachronic dimension). Two axioms are advanced that suggest a change in our view of interpersonal communication and remedy this common omission. General Axiom One: Society as we know it would cease were it not for relational change. General Axiom Two: A transition occurs between relational states. The argument is made that stability on the societal level depends upon relational change at the level of dyadic communication interaction and that adequate understanding of communication at the dyadic level depends upon acknowledging its developmental context. These theoretical positions are supported by two qualitative case studies of relational development. For analysis and interpretation the narratives of relational development rely on structural theory of Ricoeur and Levi-Strauss and social theory of Giddens.

CHANGE AND STABILITY IN RELATIONSHIPS
AND SOCIETY

This essay seeks to address two common problems with interpersonal communication research. One is that studies of dyadic communicative interaction are usually conducted without reference to the larger issues of social change and stability, as if the macro and micro levels of analysis can be divorced and treated in isolation. The other problem is that interpersonal communication studies are often conducted without reference to the history of the relationships concerned, divorced from their developmental context. My argument is that either omission is wrong-headed because the two levels of social analysis are inextricably tied. More specifically, there is an interdependence between stability of the social structure at large and relational development at the dyadic level. Hence the essay treats both problems, the divorcing of dyadic from social levels of analysis and the divorcing of dyadic communicative studies from their developmental context.

All too often scholars in interpersonal communication conduct their work without reference to macro-social issues such as social change and social stability. While we give lip service to interdependence among levels of social analysis, conceptual and methodological inertia carry us towards separating macro and micro levels. Indeed, lacking the tools to connect

those levels, studies of interpersonal communication at the micro level are normally carried out without the aid of a consciously articulated view of society. Thus, without at least rudimentary answers to the question, "How is society possible?" individual studies often flounder in a sea of relativism, lacking anchors in the social fabric.

The tendency to divorce relationships under study from their developmental contexts needs little elaboration. Ayres, Bochner and Miller all designate the developmental approach as only one of several currently active approaches to the study of interpersonal communication.¹

In the pages that follow I will (1) sketch out the rough beginnings of a picture of social and developmental process that is suitable context for the study of interpersonal communication; (2) argue that relational change is the central concept necessary to connecting the micro and macro levels of social process; and (3) present case study analyses that (a) demonstrate the links between interpersonal and social processes as well as place relationships in developmental context and (b) illustrate methods for doing so.

The thinking that follows resides at once in two kinds of context. The former concerns the kind of proposals advanced toward better understanding of interpersonal communication. The

latter concerns the tradition in which those proposals are advanced.

With regard to understanding, the essay illustrates the first and second of Scheidel's proposed "phases of inquiry."² In phase one the perspective "is expansive, searching, scanning;" "tacit knowledge and intuition are admissible;" and standards of evidence are relatively relaxed; while in phase two where theory is developed "sound reasoning is the essential standard."³ Nearly ten years after Scheidel's analysis too little communication research is of these types.

The tradition I want to claim has been skillfully advanced by Fisher and dubbed the narrative paradigm.

The idea of human beings as storytellers indicates the generic form of all symbol composition; it holds that symbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common, in communities in which there is sanction for the story that constitutes one's life.⁴

The narrative paradigm will be noted in the data used (narratives of relationship development), in the analysis employed (structural analysis informed by the work of Ricoeur and Levi-Strauss), and in the forms of explanation offered, themselves

narratives. Additionally, the methodological assumptions presented below complement and support the narrative paradigm.

Relational Transition and Society's Possibility

Hobbes, Simmel, Levi-Strauss, and O'Neill,⁵ among others, have posed the question of society's possibility. O'Neill has put the question eloquently, "How is it that men belong to one another despite all differences?"⁶ For our purposes here Levi-Strauss's discussion is most useful, for he proposed two criteria for testing possible answers to the question of society's possibility. Following Badcock's analysis of the opening chapters of The Elementary Structures of Kinship we note that Levi-Strauss focused his search for criteria on the fundamental polarity of nature and culture.⁷

Society (or culture) emerged (from a state of nature), argued Levi-Strauss, when a social practice appeared that was both natural (i.e., necessary, universal, and instinctual) and cultural (i.e., rule-bound, arbitrary, and social). He concluded that that social practice was the incest taboo. Human sexuality is certainly natural by Levi-Strauss's definition; and rules against incest, as well as their variability, certify them as cultural. His use of this observation was to explain the emergence, in primitive cultures, of kinship and therefore of social structure. If the female offspring of one family must

marry outside that group and the male offspring must seek wives outside also, there is born the kinship relations we know as in-laws plus uncles, aunts, nephews, and nieces.

But the historical emergence of culture from a state of nature is not the issue here; rather the question is whether Levi-Strauss's criteria may also serve a contemporary need to locate requisites of society. My contention is that to locate a social fact that is at once natural and cultural is to begin to answer the question, "How is society possible?" An indication we are on the right track is that Levi-Strauss's approach has the virtue of making the very connection we need, that is between dyadic relationship (marriage) and social structure at large (kinship). An application of his approach provides a context for the interpretation of studies in interpersonal communication by connecting dyadic communicative action with social process and structure.

What follows is the presentation and explanation of two general axioms of relational development that are useful in guiding our thinking in this regard.

General Axiom One: Society as we know it would not-exist were it not for relational change. Dyadic relational change meets both of Levi-Strauss's criteria. It is rooted in nature by virtue of the aging process and of attraction between men and women. Relational change is also rooted in culture. As a person ages a

succession of social roles is thrust upon him or her. In cases where attraction between a man and a woman leads to marriage and offspring and their eventual marriage, the culture at large invests those involved with progressively different social roles and therefore changed relationships.

Whether due to the passage of time or the consequences gender, we conduct those changing relationships in, by and through interpersonal communication. As well, we make our way through the sometime turbulent straits between relational states by means of interpersonal communication. Thus does one's conduct of interpersonal communication produce new social relationships or reproduce old ones in altered form.

Let us return to General Axiom One: Society as we know it would cease were it not for relational change. Two corollaries follow. Corollary One A: Relational change is necessary Several examples will demonstrate this point as well as confirm the corollary's rootedness in both nature and culture. Young children need parents to do many things for them, e.g., feed, dress, supervise play etc. What if that relationship of almost total management of young children by parents persisted beyond childhood in all parents? Maturing in the sense of taking more responsibility for one's own care would disappear as a category. So would personal freedom and independence. Presumably children would be retarded in their social development, and the more

assertive ones would rebel and leave the home prematurely to make a life apart from this oppression. If the typical relationship of parent-early childhood were "frozen," there would be no next generation to carry on the institutions of society, and collapse would follow. Therefore relational change is necessary for the continuation of society.

Consider another example. Most young adults are attracted to a member of the opposite sex and marry. That process of notice, association, courtship, and marriage requires relational change. It requires that the relational partners actually play out the progressively changing social roles prescribed by the culture at large as they approach official bonding. The escalation of their amorous relationship requires that the relationship change in significant ways. But what if it does not? What if the relationship becomes frozen at some point, e.g., at Wood's⁶ "explorational communication," where "two persons attempt to discover whether they are similar enough in terms of basic values and goals to build a common world." Frozen thusly, the relationship could never move on to e.g., "intensifying communication," where their identity as a pair is confirmed, or to "differentiating communication," where partners assert their individuality over their pair-identity. Rather than moving on to another relational state the partners in a "frozen relationship" would never have quite enough information to decide

whether to intensify the relationship or to further differentiate themselves. If all amorous relationships atrophied in their present state, it is a mundane but no less fundamental observation that society and eventually the species itself would cease. Unless the partners in amorous relationships are willing to experience relational changes, the perpetuation of society would soon be in question.

One final example, on the level of institutions, is exemplary of Corollary One A. Consider a business, one that started out quite small. If its volume steadily increases and consequently its staff expands as does its need for space, working relationships must change for the company to survive. With 500 employees, 10 locations, and an annual operating budget of \$2.5 million, relationships can't be as they were in the beginning, when the company was six persons in a rented garage who saw each other daily, and made all decisions jointly. However, if the leadership persisted in the former patterns of accessibility and decision making, the ability of the firm to do its job, would be crippled. For the company's sake those key persons (and others besides) must assume different relationships. If they do not, indeed, if persons in any institution are unable to create new relationships appropriate to the changes that are inevitably thrust upon it, the institution is in jeopardy. If all institutional relationships froze in place, the society would

be in jeopardy. Hence, Corollary One A: Relational change is necessary. The corollary is rooted in nature, specifically in aging and cross gender attraction, and it is rooted in culture for society at large thrusts upon social actors new social roles and concomitant relationships with the passage of time, the development of attraction, and institutional evolution.

Corollary One B: Society is made possible by the successful negotiation of relational transitions. First consider Corollary One B on a macrosocial level. Erikson has argued that each stage in the life cycle is marked by a central crisis.⁹ In the stage of old age, for example, the crisis pits integrity against despair. To cope successfully with this crisis yields wisdom; to be unsuccessful issues in disdain. If no one successfully negotiated the transition into old age, society's existence would soon be in question. Were the pool of wisdom and good will available from the elderly to dry up suddenly, the bitter residue of disdain would soon poison society.

The example calls for a definition of "successful negotiation." It must refer to a person's actually playing out the social roles and concomitant relationships conferred by the culture at large. In an earlier example, the parent who wanted to persist with roles appropriate for early childhood, even when the child grew beyond it, to be successful, would actually begin to grant the child more freedom and give him or her greater

responsibility. Not to do so would border on pathological or at least antisocial behavior. In like manner, for a person in the stage of old age to solve the crisis of that period by choosing disdain would constitute an unsuccessful transition by eschewing the role of wise advisor to the less experienced.¹⁰

To consider Corollary One A on a micro-social level brings us to the main concern of the essay: to explore possible connections between the macro issue of society's possibility and the micro issue of relational transition. Those possible connections lie in the same region as that traversed by Scott and Lyman:

Our concern here is with one feature of talk: its ability to shore up the timbers of fractured sociation, its ability to throw bridges between the promised and the performed, its ability to repair the broken and restore the estranged.¹¹

They dubbed such talk "accounts," specified as excuses and justifications. Unsuccessful negotiation of relational change is marked by "fractured sociation," estrangement and broken relationships. When the social fabric is torn, on the level of dyadic communicative action, we attempt repairs in the form of excuses and justifications, or we attempt to realign misfitting relationship through legislation or remediation.¹² These and other techniques of interpersonal communication are used to

maintain relationships, to prevent substantial changes in them. Thus is social structure maintained.

However, in order to plumb the relationship between interpersonal communication and social structure, it is necessary to inquire more deeply into the nature of relational transitions. Those tears in the social fabric and occasions that call for realignment are also occasions for substantive changes in relationships. Thus it becomes useful to advance General Axiom Two: A transition occurs between relational states. Many scholars who characterize relationship development refer to transitions between states or stages.¹³ Where they do not, transitions must be implied never-the-less for it would be unreasonable to expect that two persons immediately acquire all the linguistic and behavioral routines characteristic of a next stage or even that they master them at the same rate. Days, weeks or months of adjustment, trial-and-error and experimentation may be required. We seem to know almost nothing about these transitional periods between relational states.

There are several reasons this deficiency needs to be redressed. First, relational transitions are occasions for relational change. As Parks has convincingly argued, there is a strong "ideology of intimacy" in studies of interpersonal communication.¹⁴ A kind of determinism runs through many if not most studies suggesting that normal relationships ought to or do

in fact move toward increasing intimacy. He makes a strong case, however, for the normality of many relationships that achieve only partial intimacy e.g., you and your service station attendant; you and the clerk at the drug store. These need not be considered malformed or inferior relationships, ones that didn't "make it" to an imaginary ideal level of intimacy; rather they are normal, even necessary, kinds of relationships. Consistent with Parks' analysis, any relational transition is a potential time for significant relational change, including stabilizing: the next stage toward increased intimacy is not inevitable. If this is a reasonable position, then it follows that we need to know as much as possible about the transition period.

Besides the open nature of transitions, successive states being nondetermined, the second reason interstage transitions are important is that they constitute an important connector between dyadic communicative action and social structure at large. Anthony Giddens' analysis is useful here. His position revolves about the key terms, "production," "reproduction," and "structuration."

The key to understanding social order--is . . .
the shifting relations between the production and
reproduction of social life by its constituent
actors.¹⁵

Society, as "a skilled accomplishment of its members,"¹⁶ is produced (e.g., in creating new forms) or reproduced (e.g., in approximating existing patterns) by dyadic communicative action. This must be the case, to Giddens, for he further proposes that "the proper focus for the study of social reproduction is in the immediate process of the constituting interaction."¹⁷ Further, in Giddens' nomenclature, social structures are the "systems of generative rules and resources"¹⁸ available to social actors for the accomplishment of society, and "structuration, as the reproduction of practices, refers abstractly to the dynamic process whereby structures come into being."¹⁹ Structuration then is the sum total of social processes directed towards the creation or maintenance of those rules and resources that enable social actors to produce (new) or reproduce (existing) patterns of social practice.²⁰

For example, consider racism from this perspective. For it to persist certain institutions in the society must promulgate the rules that certain members are inferior in important ways and therefore must be treated specially. It would follow that the rules have implications for social resource management: Certain resources would be unavailable in some degree to those members held to be inferior--education, information, jobs, attention, health care. To the extent that the promulgation of those rules is effective, the social practices of racism would be reproduced

in the society. To the extent that the promulgation of those rules is ineffective and access to social resources became open to those designated inferior members, new social practices would be produced. Thus would the society move away from the social system of racism. To take a structurational perspective on the problem of racism then would be to focus on the level of dyadic communicative action and pose the questions of how that interpersonal communication contributed to the reproduction of racist social practices, and how it contributed to the maintenance of rules and resources that facilitated that kind of interpersonal communication in the first place.

Giddens' position has the virtue of specifying a link between society (the reproduction of forms of social life) and dyadic communicative action ("the immediate process of the constituting interaction"). Thus is provided an appropriate (and usually missing) context for interpersonal communication studies: A casual conversation or business transaction or argument may contribute to the continuity or stability of social life or to its evolution. Until the specification of such linkages becomes commonplace, scholarship in interpersonal communication will be less useful to society at large than it should be, less useful to adjacent disciplines than it could be, and it will lack a useful benchmark for self evaluation.

Before moving into the case studies that will utilize and illustrate the concepts articulated above, we should summarize the position in skeletal form.

General Axiom One: Society as we know it would cease were it not for relational change.

Corollary One A: Relational Change is necessary.

Corollary One B: Society is made possible by the successful negotiation of relational transitions.

General Axiom Two: A transition occurs between relational stages.

RELATIONAL TRANSITION: ASSUMPTIONS,

METHODS, AND CASES

Relational transitions are a form of second-order development in interpersonal communication.²¹ Second-order development refers to an outcome of interpersonal communication that is characterized by a fundamental alteration of the relationship between the dyad members, the "generic restructurization of a matrix," in Raush's words.²² Examples include relationships that span several years, such as that of a parent whose relationship with his or her child evolves as the child matures through adolescence and into adulthood as well as those that cover a brief period of time, e.g., the mutual adjustment of a student and an instructor over a school term.

The following account of assumptions and methods underlying

the study of second-order development in interpersonal communication and methods for its investigation come substantially from Conville's version.²³ Then follows the presentation of two cases of relational transition.

Assumptions

1. The social sciences are necessarily historical.²⁴
2. Actors' retrospective accounts of experience are valid data for the social sciences.²⁵
3. An adequate explanation is both systematic and narrative.²⁶
4. Human action is language-like.²⁷
5. Human action is amenable to analysis by the techniques of structural analysis.²⁸
6. Second-order development is best observed by examining the personal transformations of relationship members, for they are logically prior to changes in the interpersonal system itself.²⁹

Methods

Conville³⁰ has introduced a research technique that will enable the investigator to locate, describe, and interpret second-order development in interpersonal communication. The steps are as follows: First, collect an account of second-order development by a member of the interpersonal system. To qualify, that

member must have come to conceive of the relationship in radically different terms as compared to an earlier time. The informant tells the story of that change process, and the text of that story is the account.

Second, analyze the account. This is done after the manner of Levi-Strauss,³¹ and as illustrated by Conville.³² Step 1 of analysis is to divide the account into its major episodes and place them in temporal order. The researcher may make this division, or if the informant is available, it would be appropriate to have him or her do it. Step 2 of analysis is to arrange the episodes into a rows-and-columns grid that will preserve the chronology of episodes as well as classify the episodes, each episode type occupying a different column. An example similar to one created by Levi-Strauss³³ will illustrate this step. Take the following string of letters to be a chronological list of episodes in a hypothetical account: C' D A" A B D' E D" C B' B" A'. A rows-and-columns grid that displays both the temporal order and a typology of episodes is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

In the grid each class of episodes is named by a letter of the alphabet, C, D, A, B and E, and occupies its own column. The order of episode classes (and hence columns) arrayed across the top of the grid follows the order in which the classes are introduced in the account. Hence C is the first column in the grid (Figure 1) because a member of that class, C', was the first episode in the account; and A, for example, is the third column, moving left to right in the grid, because A (represented by A") appeared in the account after members of C and D had appeared.

The class or episode type A is composed of three particular episodes, A, A', and A", and so on through episode class E, which is composed of only one member, E. In the hypothetical account there are three episodes in each of the three classes A, B, and D, two in class C, and one in class E. Note too that in constructing a grid, a new row is begun in the grid when episodes of the same class are contiguous in the account (see Figure 1, episodes 3-4 and 10-11) and when a member of a previously introduced episode class reappears in the account (see Figure 1; episodes 2, 6, and 8 are all members of episode class D).

The third and last step of the proposed technique is to interpret the grid. Interpretations are to be made by reference to the question, "What does the grid indicate about the process of second-order development in interpersonal communication?" Therefore, the contents of participants' new interpersonal system are only tangentially relevant to interpretation. Rather, the central task of interpretation is to provide a better understanding of the process by which the interactants developed their new interpersonal systems. The desired outcome is a general model for the succession of systems.

Several operations on the grid will aid interpretation. They are designed to provide the researcher with multiple ways to characterize participants' experiences. As with the procedure outlined above, the additional operations will be illustrated below in the case studies. First, the researcher (or the informant if he or she is available) should devise a word or phrase to label each column in the grid. The label should answer the question, "What do the episodes in this group signify to the actor?"

Second, the researcher or informant should code each column or class of episodes for valence (+, 0, -).

This coding should answer the question, "What kind of feelings, in the aggregate, did the episodes in a particular class evoke in the actor?"

Third, there are some questions about the display of episodes in the grid that will aid interpretation. For example, noting whether the episodes fall into a linear array can be important. A linear array would have the episodes beginning in the upper left and forming a diagonal band terminating in the lower right. The grid in Figure 1 had hardly any linear features about it. Also noting clusters of episodes and lone episodes in the grid as a whole can aid interpretation. In Figure 1 there are three clusters of episodes in each of the three types, D, A, and B. And note that the seventh episode, E, is the only one in its class and that it stands apart from the others.

Cases of Interstage Transition

Bolton has observed that relationships often encounter crucial "turning points" in the course of their development.³⁴ That was certainly the experience of Howard and Judy whose relational transition is recounted below. In fact their experience is a clear illustration of one expected effect of uncertainty increase reported by Planalp and Honeycutt, an

increase in intimacy.³⁵ They concluded, "events that increase uncertainty may constitute critical events in relationships, in the sense that relational trajectories are strongly influenced by them for good or for ill."³⁶

Howard and Judy were married in the summer of 1975. Early in April the next year they moved so that Howard could transfer to a large state university in order to meet entrance requirements for veterinary school. "Howard" and "Judy" are pseudonyms, and they independently wrote the accounts that are summarized below in January and April, respectively, of 1977. These narratives of relational transition were written as part of a class requirement in interpersonal communication to recount a significant learning experience. The complete original cases are in the possession of this author.

Several important criteria guided their selection: accessibility; face validity; mutual participation, and theoretical usefulness. As anyone working with qualitative data well knows, access to usable cases is not easy. The availability of these cases in the author's files was therefore an important consideration. The cases also demonstrate face validity. That is, it should be clear to readers that the cases are straightforward examples of relational development or interstage transition in interpersonal communication. Since dyadic communicative interaction entails mutuality and reciprocity it is

useful, whenever possible, to examine episodes from the points of view of both participants not from just one. These cases provide that all-too-rare opportunity. A final criterion that guided the selection of these cases was theoretical usefulness. Philipsen has argued that one "of the uses of the qualitative case study in developing communication theories" is "to test the soundness of extant claims."³⁷ In the present circumstance the cases presented and analyzed below provide evidence bearing on the usefulness to interpersonal communication inquiry of Giddens' concepts of production and reproduction of social practices and of structuration. They also provide evidence bearing on the usefulness of the two General Axioms advanced above that specify linkage between dyadic communicative action and the social structure.

Howard's Case. Howard looked forward to his and Judy's move to Raleigh with great anticipation: the sense of freedom from parental and hometown domination, the prospect of making their own home, and the approaching reality of graduation all combined to drive his enthusiasm to a peak. But Judy saw it quite the opposite: moving meant leaving the security of home and family and letting go of her "best friend," Tracy. Howard firmly believed that achieving happiness and security was a matter of personal struggle and required moves such as the one they were making.

So off they drove to Raleigh with Howard gleefully singing at the top of his lungs and Judy crying buckets full. Within a month however, Howard's patience wore thin. He and Judy argued often and bitterly. He resented her lack of support for his goals and began to doubt her love. With Judy seeming to be on the brink of a breakdown and with no improvement in sight, Howard took "an indefinite leave of absence from life . . . to try to make sense of it all." He left with no hope, not caring to ever see Judy again, and as he put it, "I didn't care about anything but myself."

Setting out for Canada, he made it only as far as Cape Hatteras. There on the beach he did begin to make sense of it all. He regained "a lost sense of equilibrium" and his sense of self respect. And more, each time he would recall good times from the past he would also recall Judy. Time and again that happened until it dawned on him that he really didn't want to run away from her. He began to sort out the real from the fantasy, what he detested from what he loved. He loved Judy he rediscovered and sped home "confidently praying she would take me back." And she did. "She too was able to forgive, and I was no longer afraid to admit I needed her."

Judy's Case. Judy had learned to treasure a "best friend" as early as eighth grade. Following her husband of less than a year to another city was hard enough: "I did have my securities:

a good job, my parents, just knowing at least one person wherever I went." But leaving her best friend Tracy? That was another thing! The move was necessary for Howard to transfer to a large state university in order to meet entrance requirements for vet school. The problem was leaving Tracy. Even as the departure date approached she and Tracy could not bring themselves to talk about it. Compounding the move was the fact that Tracy would soon be married. She and Judy knew their paths were even less likely to cross after that. Howard said he understood, but Judy did not believe him.

After a tearful parting Judy and Howard left for Raleigh. They arrived "totally exhausted, no money, and with only one car that broke down as soon as we arrived." Things went downhill from there. As Judy put it, "I was an emotional time bomb." She and Howard bickered constantly and threw in an occasional good (verbal) fight. Howard got an 8-5 job for the summer, and Judy used her days ostensibly getting the house settled while actually writing letters to Tracy, sipping coffee, "getting high," and having imaginary conversations with Tracy.

After two weeks of this routine Judy got a job at a bar adjacent to the campus, and her hours were the opposite of Howard's. She left for work about the time he arrived home, often returning as late as 3 a.m.

Howard had not been in very good shape either since the move. He finally told Judy what was bothering him. He resented her taking the move as badly as she had and not sharing his excitement. This revelation came in the midst of Judy's beginning to feel that their marriage "was more of a burden than an asset. . . .[she] wasn't content with him or anything else." To make matters worse Tracy came for a weekend visit. That only served to emphasize how strongly Judy missed the security she had left.

About a month after the move Howard's parents came for a visit, and Howard and Judy were to meet them at a nearby resort town. Driving over during a heavy late afternoon downpour, they began arguing. The arguing turned into a shouting match, and at the first opportunity Judy jumped out of the car. "I was crying hysterically, confused as hell, and all I could think to do was get away from Howard. . . I don't remember a great deal except the feeling of fear: of Howard, of the darkness, of the state of mind I was in."

After that rather drastic episode they didn't argue any more. Judy withdrew and simply became disinterested. They began to consider splitting up, and, after talking it out with a mutual friend decided to separate for a while. ". . .we had developed a hardness; were sick of each other, our relationship, the whole affair in general."

They had been in Raleigh about two months now. Howard and a cousin left with Canada their destination. Judy stayed behind in the house, looking forward to being alone, where she did "some pretty heavy thinking. I decided I needed to find a new source of energy; not a friend or husband but something or someone who would always be there, who had an indispensable amount of patience, time, energy, and love." Up to now Judy's approach to religion, Christianity, had been one of caution and skepticism. "I decided if I was going 'to find God,' I was going to do it by myself, without the help of Billy Graham or Anita Bryant."

Then Judy decided to visit Tracy who by now had moved to Charleston. But it wasn't as she'd anticipated. She wasn't comfortable there. "My grasping dependency on Tracy diminished. It also made me realize that I needed much more than her to be content." There was a positive side however. "I made a new friend; I'll call him God for lack of a better name. One night I was extremely upset and . . . I told God that if He and I were going to be friends, let's do it now. I hesitate in describing what I felt for fear of sounding like a T.V. testimonial, but I experienced the most incredible feeling of peacefulness, of contentment at that moment. . ."

Leaving Tracy was easy this time. Rather, Judy she was "anxious to get home to show Howard the 'new me,' to give him all the love he most assuredly deserved."

Howard was not there when she returned home, and the thought that he might not return at all frightened Judy. However, he did, and they were happily reunited. He sneaked up to the porch where she was sitting, writing him a letter, and surprised her. "We held each other and without having to say anything, we knew the past was over; we knew everything was all right; we knew we were hopelessly in love."

Relational Transition and Social Structure

Analysis of Cases

Howard and Judy had quite different styles of remembering and of writing. These are reflected in both the case summaries and in the chronologies. However, the similarity of content that the two independently produced narratives share is strong evidence of the experience's validity. Judy and Howard did in fact go through an interstage transition in their relationship. Chronologies of that transition are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

The first step in analysis, as outlined above, is to create a chronological list of important episodes based on the narratives. By important is meant the pivotal episodes, those that drove the account toward its conclusion. The episode lists

presented in Figure 2 below are based on the author's reading of the full accounts and are reflected in the case summaries above.

The second step in analysis of the accounts is to arrange the episodes in a rows-and-columns grid. This procedure preserves the temporal order of events in the account while aiding the discovery of like and unlike elements in the narrative. The rows of the grid, read left to right and top to bottom, represent the sequential relationships among episodes, while the columns represent the types of episodes that comprise to narrative. In Figure 3 are the grid analyses of Howard's and Judy's accounts.

Figure 3

The third step in analysis of the account is to interpret the grids. The goal is to explicate the "depth semantics" of the narrative,³⁸ "to reconstruct it in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning."³⁹

A useful means of accomplishing this task is to pose a label for each the column of similar episodes in the grid guided by the question: "What do the episodes in the group signify to the actor?". I have taken the liberty of inserting a set of such labels into Figure 3. They are terms that seem to accurately name the meanings of the episode types for both Judy and

Howard.⁴⁰ Our concern is to understand the accounts as the participants themselves did and try to use that understanding to extend our theorizing about relational development. Structural analysis provides a means of interpreting narratives of relational transition in their developmental context, and an application of Giddens' concept of structuration provides a means of linking the level of dyadic communitive action with the level of social structure.

Interpretation of Cases

The two accounts of relational transition shared important similarities. The most important was the type of episode that composed the relational transition. For both Judy and Howard the episodes seemed to signify Anticipation, Separation, Discovery, and Reconciliation. In addition, the grids indicated a linear experience, that is, moving from left to right, all episodes of a particular type (e.g., Anticipation) were completed before the episode of another type started (e.g., Separation), and none of the former type reappeared. Therefore the two accounts shared a similar paradigmatic form (the episode types, Anticipation through Reconciliation) as well as a similar syntagmatic form (the linear sequence of events is similar as well as the sequence of episode types). Not only was there independent corroboration of "what happened," but also the structure of the relational transitions was validated by the corroboration of formal aspects. Finally,

the two accounts shared a set of polar opposite terms that describe the dramatic tension driving the narratives to their conclusions. These include old-new, past-future, and separation-reconciliation. Then there is the complementary term-pair, anticipation-discovery, that seems to play a mediating role, encompassing the oppositions noted above.⁴¹

A detailed examination of the episode types in the two accounts will support the assertion that the Anticipation - Separation - Discovery - Reconciliation sequence best represented the underlying structure of the interstage transition. The problem being addressed here is the tendency for researchers to examine interpersonal communication apart from its developmental context. Structural analysis of relational narratives is the solution proposed. The task of structural analysis as described in the above methods section, is summarized in Barthes' formulation: "to reconstruct an 'object' in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning . . . of the object."⁴² What one has, as a result of structural analysis, "is therefore actually a simulacrum of the object, but a directed, interested simulacrum, since the imitated object makes something appear which remained invisible, or if one prefers, unintelligible in the natural object."⁴³

To both Judy and Howard the experience seemed to signify at first Anticipation (refer to Figures 3A and 3B). Howard's

anticipation was a positive sensation, looking forward to the freedom it represented. Judy's anticipation was wholly negative. In the context of having discovered at an early age the joys of friendship and of having just recently found a "best friend" in Tracy, her view into the future revealed loneliness and insecurity. Here we have the first of several oppositions that are fundamental to the accounts. His anticipation was joyful, hers distressing.

Then there was Separation. To Howard it was in two steps, first the deterioration of his and Judy's relationship after the move, and second his leaving, "to try to make sense of it all." Judy's experience of Separation seemed more complex. First she was separated from familiar persons and surroundings when they moved; second, her relationship with Howard deteriorated after the move; that erosion turned to estrangement with her plunge into the darkness during the stormy drive to meet Howard's parents; and finally, Separation for Judy culminated in her (actually their) decision to live apart for a time.

With Separation also was introduced half the third fundamental polarity of the transition: Separation - Reconciliation. From a distance, separated, they each saw the other as before, when their relationship was new, and were reconciled.

Discovery followed Separation. Not a member of polar opposites, Discovery is rather a member of the complementary pair: Anticipation - Discovery. Howard reported his discovery took the form of a re-discovery of Judy on a pensive seashore. In sorting out his recent past, recalling good friends and good times, Judy invariably came to mind. His discovery was made in the past.

But Judy's discovery was focused on the future. She decided to "find God", she entered Tracy's new life in Charleston (e.g., rather than recollecting her old one from before the move), and she acquired through it all a sense of "new me." In Discovery Howard worked on old experiences in the past; Judy sought new experiences, and moved into the future with excitement.

The narratives were driven it seems by an antiphony of old-new, positive-negative, past-future. In Anticipation Judy had looked to the past as a source of energy and support and Howard had looked to the future. In Discovery their aspects were reversed: another polarity.

And yet another, Separation and Reconciliation. To Howard Reconciliation was marked by his return to Raleigh and joyful reception by Judy. To Judy Reconciliation was in their happy embrace, knowing "the past was over."

This instance of relational transition was marked by episodes of a certain kind, ones that signified to the

participants Anticipation, Separation, Discovery, and Reconciliation, and by the fundamental polarities of positive-negative, old-new, past-future, separation-reconciliation, plus the complementary pair Anticipation-Discovery. Additional oppositions presented themselves when the players swapped roles: in Anticipation Howard looked to the future, Judy to the past; in Discovery Judy looked to the future, Howard the past. Thus stressed by these primeval forces a relationship in one state or of one type became, turned into, a relationship of another state or type. An interstage transition in the relationship had been accomplished.

Three conclusions are evident from this interpretation. First, it provides evidence that there is a process that may be reasonably thought of as interstage transition. The corroboration of both sequence and type of episodes in the participants' narratives suggests that there is an inter-stage between any two states in a relational transition.

Second, the interpretation suggests that interstage transition has an underlying structure consisting of a succession of episode types that signify in turn Anticipation, Separation, Discovery, and Reconciliation. This particular version of underlying structure applies only to relationships that survive the stresses of transition and remain intact to enjoy the succeeding state.

Third, interstage transitions seem to be generated by a series of opposing forces or polar opposites. The cases of Howard and Judy suggested the polarities of positive and negative, past and future, old and new, and Separation and Reconciliation (plus the complementary pair of Anticipation and Discovery and the participants' exchange of aspects in Anticipation as compared to Discovery).

The foregoing analysis has seemingly taken us far from the main argument of this essay: That, the stability of social structure at large depends upon relational development at the dyadic level. Through structural analysis of relational narratives we have set the relationships under study within their proper (i.e., developmental) context. Now we must look to the connections between the dyadic relational transition documented in the above accounts, on the one hand, and on the other, social change and stability in the society at large. Here we rely on the central concepts of production, reproduction and structuration of social life from the work of Anthony Giddens. Recall that for Giddens structuration refers to the sum total of social processes directed towards the creation or maintenance of those rules and resources that enable social actors to produce (new) or reproduce (existing) patterns of social practice. Axioms One and Two will serve as guides in this discussion.

Axiom One: Society as we know it would cease were it not for relational change. The relational transition experienced by Judy and Howard led to the reproduction of marriage as a social practice and therefore contributed to its perpetuation as a convention in society. The outcome of the transition caused the continuation of Howard and Judy's marriage (reproduction of an existing social practice), while it also produced a new kind of relationship for Howard and Judy. The end product was therefore both old and new.

Corollary One A: Relational change is necessary. Howard and Judy invoked two rules of relationship to facilitate their relational transition. First is the social convention that marriage in the USA must yield happiness or it must be terminated. Neither was happy, and they moved toward ending the marriage. The second rule deals with handling conflict: when at odds, as they were, back away "to clear your head." By mutual agreement they did just that, and by both accounts, it was a decision readily arrived at.

Corollary One B: Society is made possible by the successful negotiation of relational transitions. To some extent Judy and Howard's success in weathering their relational transition was due to the resources they had at their disposal. In order to invoke the rule to back off from their conflict to reassess the situation, they needed money. One doesn't take off for Canada or

even end up on Cape Hatteras, as Howard did, with empty pockets; or in Judy's case, go to Charleston, penniless. Then there was the resource of transportation. Their accounts do not say, but apparently Judy took the "family" car with Howard in his cousin's car. In any case they both had easily available private, not public, transportation. A related resource was Howard's family--his cousin with whom he left for Canada. Finally, time was a resource for both Judy and Howard. Somehow both got time off from work or perhaps even quit. In any case, time as a resource was supported by two social rules. One is the typical nine month school year, and the other is the convention of summer, student-oriented, temporary or part-time employment. And both these rules supported the availability of financial resources to "get away."

Thus from a structurational point of view Howard and Judy helped to maintain certain rules and resources (by making use of them) as well as employed those rules and resources to act out the implications of General Exiom One and its corollaries. From a wider perspective, Judy and Howard were doing much more than coping with an interpersonal conflict. They were also using social rules and resources--itself a maintenance activity--that resulted in a contribution to the maintenance of social structure. They were supporting stability on the societal level

while at the same time experiencing a profound relational change at the dyadic level.

General Axiom Two: An interstage transition occurs between relational stages. An implication of the discussion of Axiom One is that an interstage transition is a form of structuration. From this perspective the participants in any interstage transition necessarily use certain social rules and resources in the accomplishment of the transition. Or their actions may help create new rules or tap new resources if they are somehow precedent setting. In either case a different relational stage or state lies on each side of participants' use of social rules and resources to cope with the consequences of gender or the passage of time.

Approaching the same assertion--that an interstage transition is a form of structuration--from the other side yields the same result. From this perspective a relationship is an action sequence based on a rule-set. Therefore, when social actors begin to respond to existing rules not previously in their repertoire or to make their own (new) rules, and draw on available resources, structuration processes, they necessarily engage in interstage transition. New rules and resources equals a new dyadic relational type, thus again social action at the dyadic level is inextricably tied to patterns of social structure.

Summary and Conclusions

Interpersonal communication may be taken to occur in two dimensions, the diachronic and the synchronic. When considered in its diachronic (historical, temporal, horizontal) dimension, interpersonal communication is set in a developmental context. Viewed in its synchronic (simultaneous, multi-layered, vertical) dimension it is set in a societal context amid issues of social change and stability.

An axiom and two corollaries were advanced to specify relationships within the synchronic dimension of interpersonal communication--its societal context.

Axiom One: Society as we know it would cease were it not for relational change.

Corollary One A: Relational change is necessary.

Corollary One B: Society is made possible by the successful negotiation of relational transitions

An axiom was also advanced to focus special attention on the diachronic dimension of interpersonal communication--its developmental context.

Axiom two: A transition occurs between relational stages.

I have illustrated the efficacy of so conceiving of interpersonal communication and have further argued that the two orthogonal dimensions are interdependent. Analysis of two narrative accounts of relational development indicated that

relational development seems to depend upon certain rules and resources supplied by the social structure, and that the stability of social structures may depend upon relational development at the level of dyadic communicative action.

With regard to method, I have also illustrated an analytical technique adapted from Levi-Strauss's method of myth analysis and Ricoeur's notion of human-action-as-text. While these tools and perspectives stand in the narrative tradition and address concerns of the diachronic dimension of interpersonal communication, the concept of structuration from Giddens' work was employed to address concerns of the synchronic dimension.

The essay is grounded in the narrative tradition⁴⁴ where humans are seen as providing stories to bring order to their experience.

— Stories, narratives of relational development, were taken as data in the studies above, and a method for analyzing and interpreting them in their developmental context was demonstrated (General Axiom Two).

The approach that views communication as action also provides grounding for the essay. Writing within the same tradition as Giddens, Pearce and Cronen have suggested that one implication of communication as action is that "there is a reciprocal causal relationship between apparently mundane communicative events and the characteristics of the social

order."⁴⁵ But the data and analyses above suggest that the boundaries of this statement should be stretched to include another dimension, the temporal. Social structure not only has a reciprocal relationship to "mundane communicative events," but also to the developmental context of those events in which they exist as relationships (General Axiom One).

A question may arise regarding the status of the generalizations advanced above. Given the unpredictable nature of social life, argues MacIntyre,⁴⁶ the best generalizations it is possible for the social sciences to make possess the following characteristics: (1) based on research but not approaching law-likeness; (2) co-exist beside counter-examples; and (3) lack a specified scope. Such generalizations therefore would be appropriately preceded by a statement like: "Characteristically and for the most part, . . ."

In other words the logical form of these generalizations--or the lack of it--turns out to be rooted in the form--or the lack of it--of human life. We should not be surprised or disappointed that the generalizations and maxims of the best social science share certain characteristics of their predecessors--the proverbs of folk societies, the generalizations of jurists, the maxims of Machiavelli.⁴⁷

The generalizations advanced in this essay are modest ones in that they are of the type characterized by MacIntyre. My hope is that they also are of the type characterized by Scheidel:⁴⁸ expansive, searching, relying somewhat on tacit knowledge, holding a liberal view of evidence, and demonstrating sound reasoning.

NOTES

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¹⁵Anthony Giddens, New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretive Sociologies (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 102.

¹⁶Giddens, p. 102.

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¹⁸Giddens, p. 127.

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³²Conville, "Change;" Conville, "Phenomenological Structuralism."

³³Levi-Strauss, p. 213.

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³⁶Planalp and Honeycutt, p. 601.

³⁷Gerry Philipson, "The Qualitative Case Study as a Strategy in Communication Inquiry," The Communicator, 12 (1982), pp. 10-11.

³⁸Ricoeur, p. 557.

³⁹Roland Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity," in The Structuralists from Marx to Levi-Strauss, ed. Richard and Fernande De George (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), p. 149.

⁴⁰Whether the columns also represent opposing narrative elements that are ultimately transcended or mediated by the story's outcome, as Levi-Strauss argued is true for myths, is a provocative question but one beyond the scope of this essay. See Peter J. Claus, "A Structuralist Appreciation of 'Star Trek,'" in The American Dimension, Cultural Myths and Social Realities, ed. W. Arens and Susan P. Montague (Port Washington, N.Y.: Alfred Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 15-32.

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⁴²Barthes, p. 149.

⁴³Barthes.

⁴⁴Fisher.

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⁴⁸Scheidel, pp. 30-31.

FIGURE 1
Analysis of a Hypothetical Account

<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>E</u>
1. C'	2. D	3. A*		
		4. A	5. B	
	6. D'			7. E
9. C	8. D*		10. B'	
			11. B*	
		12. A'		

Figure 2
Episode Chronologies of Judy's and Howard's Cases

Judy's Case

1. met "best friend"
2. moved to Raleigh
3. deterioration of
J and H's relationship
4. went to meet H's parents
in resort town
5. decided to separate
for a while
6. J alone; decided to
"find God"
7. realized her "grasping
dependency on Tracy
8. found God and a sense
of "new me"
9. H returned home and they
"knew the past was over"

Howard's Case

1. moved to Raleigh
2. deterioration of H &
J's relationship
3. H left
4. at seashore: a lot of
remembering and setting
priorities
5. "rediscovered" J
6. H returned to Raleigh
7. H and J reconciled

Figure 3 A
Howard's Account in Grid Display;

<u>Anticipation</u>	<u>Separation</u>	<u>Discovery</u>	<u>Reconciliation</u>
1. moved to Raleigh	2. deterioration of H & J's relationship		
	3. H left	4. at seashore: a lot of remembering & setting priorities	
		5. "rediscovered" J	6. H returned to Raleigh
			7. H & J reconciled

Figure 3 B
Judy's Account in Grid Display;

<u>Anticipation</u>	<u>Separation</u>	<u>Discovery</u>	<u>Reconciliation</u>
1. met "best friend"	2. moved to Raleigh		
	3. deterioration of J & H's relationship		
	4. went to meet H's parents in resort town		
	5. decided to separate for a while	6. J along; decided to "find God"	
		7. realized her "grasping dependency on Tracy"	
		8. found God and a sense of "new me"	
			9. H returned home and they "knew the past was over"